Managing Recreation Conflicts in a Forest Development Plan

Complaint 980161

The Investigation

On August 13, 1998, the Forest Practices Board received a complaint from a mountaineering school operator in the Bulkley/Cassiar Forest District. The complainant was concerned about impacts of proposed forest practices on his business and on an historic trail. The complainant asserted that Pacific Inland Resources (the licensee) failed to recognize and plan for recreation under the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan for Forest Licences A16830, A46054, A57077 and Timber Sale Licence A16858.

The complaint had two parts. The first part asserts that the licensee did not locate the Moricetown-Cronin trail correctly on forest development plan maps and that proposed cutblocks were too close to, or on, the trail. The parties to the complaint met several times and resolved this issue. The Board encourages settlement of complaints at the local level and is pleased that the parties resolved this part of the complaint.

The rest of this report concerns the second part of the complaint, involving the same forest development plan, but in a different area. The licensee proposed roads and cutblocks in the upper Blunt Creek area that would allow snowmobile access to the alpine. Snowmobiles in the alpine would reduce the utility of the area for backcountry skiing. The complainant asserts that the licensee and district manager have responsibilities to manage recreation, including conflicts between recreational users such as snowmobile enthusiasts and skiers, through forest development plan preparation and approval.

The Code requires that a licensee make a forest development plan available to the public for review and comment. The licensee and district manager considered the comments made by the complainant for three successive forest development plan review and comment periods. The complainant thought that the licensee should address the effect of the new roads. Snowmobiles would gain access to the alpine and detract from the skiing experience in that area. The licensee did not accept the responsibility to manage this conflict. The licensee made

changes to the forest development plan, but none of the revisions would prevent snowmobile access to the alpine.

Finding #1: The licensee prepared and submitted the forest development plan in accordance with the Forest Practices Code (Code). The licensee complied with the Code content requirements concerning recreation in the forest development plan and with the public review and comment requirements.

Under section 41(1)(b) of the Act, the district manager needs to be satisfied that a forest development plan adequately manages and conserves the forest resources before approving the forest development plan. The district manager used information received through review and comment on the forest development plan for this purpose. The district manager also used information from the Bulkley Land and Resources Management Plan (LRMP). The LRMP initiated a district-wide recreational access management planning process. The LRMP was not a higher level plan, but the district manager reported that he had considered the objectives for the draft LRMP in the approval of the forest development plan. The forest development plan did not conflict with any of the objectives of the draft LRMP. The most relevant objective of the LRMP to this complaint was to "prepare a plan to address existing and potential activities among recreational users." The recreational access management plan was such a plan. The recreational access management plan resolved most access management issues but left winter access to the upper Blunt Creek area unresolved.

Finding #2: Through successive review and comment periods for the forest development plan, the district manager was aware of the views of the complainant. The forest development plan did not conflict with the objectives of the Bulkley LRMP. The district manager considered that forest resources of the area, including recreation, were being adequately managed and conserved. The district manager considered relevant information. The decision to approve the forest development plan complied with the Code and was reasonable.

Conclusions

The proposed cutblocks in upper Blunt Creek underwent successive forest development plan review and comment processes. The licensee complied with the requirements of the Code.

In his approval of the forest development plan, the district manager was satisfied that the licensee's planned harvesting and road-building activities would adequately manage and conserve the forest resources, including recreation. The Board is satisfied that the district manager's decision to approve the forest development plan complied with the Code and was reasonable.

Commentary

The underlying issue in this complaint was the conflict among recreational users. This issue was addressed in the Board's 1998 report *Restrictions on Motorized Vehicle Recreation in the Harold Prince and Blunt Creek Areas*. The Board recommended that the Ministry of Forests provide guidance to district managers on how to administer such recreational conflicts. To the best of our knowledge, the ministry still has not done so. If it had, this investigation might not have been necessary.

The panel of the Board that concluded this report was John Cuthbert, Klaus Offermann and Mark Haddock.